Myth Information

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In This Issue:

"For Bettor or Verse" by Robert Asprin

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Special New *Myth* Story Issue!

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Club Information

Back Issues: Issues 1-4 of *MythInformation* are out of print. Damaged copies of issues 3,4,6,7, and 8 returned as undeliverable are available for $1. Copies of issues 5-11 are $1.50 each. Copies of issue 12/13 are $2.50 each. Use The Bazaar to order. As we go to press, there are less than five copies of issues 5-9 in our inventory. Please state alternate choices in case your order can not be filled.

Submissions: Send all submissions of *Myth*ical artwork, short stories, filksongs, poetry, letters of comment, etc., to *MythInformation*, PO Box 95, Sutter CA 95982-0095. Submissions not accompanied by a sufficiently large SASE will not be returned. Good quality photocopies of artwork are acceptable. We always need a lot of small "fillo" artwork. **Computer Users Note:** text submissions may be submitted via CompuServe® account #72377,3623 or on Macintosh® microfloppy disk readable by MacWrite® or Microsoft Word®.

Memberships: Membership prices are listed in The Bazaar. A Class A membership includes (subject to change without notice), a membership card, a pin-back "Aahz" button, a bumper sticker,ten 1-inch "Tananda" stickers, and an 8 1/2x11 inch print by Ken Mitchroney, signed and numbered by Ken and Beth Mitchroney (second series). Also included are issues of *MythInformation* as specified in The Bazaar. Class B (upgrade) memberships include the membership package material, but not the issues, and may only be used to supplement an existing class A or C membership. Class C memberships do not include the membership merchandise,and may be used only to extend an existing membership. For a full description of all membership classes, send a SASE to MAFC, Attn: Class Descriptions, at the mailing address above.

When to Renew: The second line of your mailing label indicates the last issue of *MythInformation* you will receive on your membership. If the second line of your mailing label reads "Membership Expires 14" then your membership has expired and it is time to renew. Always include your membership number when renewing.

WE GENERALLY DO NOT SEND RENEWAL NOTICES

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Myth-Haps

Kevin Standlee

*Note: In response to a number of rather pointed requests from certain members, we are going to try putting news regarding the **MythAdventures** series and Robert Asprin in a separate sidebar, while **Myth-Haps** will remain as the news about what's happening in the Fan Club proper.*

We're back! Okay, we are a bit late in presenting this issue, and you all deserve an explanation. As usual, it requires me to get self-indulgently personal. If you don't care that this issue should have mailed the first week of February instead of the last week of April, you can skip to the next section of this column, or go read "For Bettor or Verse."

The Real Job that your Humble Editor works at to support his maniacal habit of running MAFC began working overtime shifts about the first of this year, and Yours Truly worked nearly all of them, sometimes up to twelve hours a day, in an effort to get enough money to send him to all of the conventions we are scheduled to attend this year, especially the Worldcon in Boston. As a result, he kept putting the issue off, and putting it off until the overtime shifts ended the first of April.

I hope none of you are mad at me for pursuing $$ instead of editing **MythInformation**, but rest assured that your "one-year" membership in MAFC actually lasts four issues, no matter how long that may take. (On the average, it seems to take fourteen months to cover a "year" of **MythInformation**.) End of self-indulgent personal reflections.

Mark IV Member Package In Production

If you have joined or renewed your membership since the first of this year and received nothing but this issue from us, don't panic! We are simply putting together a brand new package of membership premiums by Ken Mitchroney, and when they are completed, all qualifying members will

continued➡

Notes from Ann Arbor

Product and Professional Updates

Discussions with Robert Asprin over CompuServe and our calls to various publishers have produced the following news items regarding future **Myth** books and related projects, as well as news of a convention Robert Asprin will be attending in May.

Robert Asprin lives in Ann Arbor, Michigan, providing us with the title of this feature.

Comic Book on Hold

All existing contracts and arrangements for graphic adaptations of the **Myth** novels have been completed with the publication of **Myth Conceptions #8**. Asprin notes that while he is open to and is currently reviewing proposals to continue the series, he has been disappointed by the low

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Myth-Haps
(continued)

receive a new signed-and-numbered print by Ken Mitchroney, membership card, bumper-sticker, button, and set of small stickers. The new button will be Aahz—the design that placed second by a single vote in the member survey in issue 8, for those of you who have been around since then. The new membership card features Skeeve casting a little Magik, and Tananda will be smiling from the new stickers. If you become concerned about the status of your membership, call the MAFC Hotline at **(916) 342-MYTH** and leave a message including your membership number as shown on your mailing label, your name, number, and question, and we will get back to you as soon as we can.

New Membership Directory Planned

Trying to predict the schedule or contents of future issues of **MythInformation** has proven to be as difficult as tap-dancing in quicksand, but we're going to try it anyway. Next issue will probably be a new edition of the **MAFC Membership Directory**, filled primarily with listings of all current MAFC members. The last directory was in issue 10, and despite an update last issue, has grown considerably out of date. This time, we plan to use a straight zip- or postal-code listing format and are experimenting with methods of reproducing the list in an easier-to-read style. Any suggestions would be appreciated. Don't forget to renew your membership if it expires this issue, and be sure your name and address on your mailing label is the way you want it to appear in the Directory. Also remember that if you do **not** want your name listed, you need to let us know as soon as possible, and no later than June 30, 1989. Once you have your name removed from the public list, it will stay removed unless you change your mind.

MAFC Accessible Through CompuServe®

If you have an account on the CompuServe® computer network, you can write to us here at MAFC by E-Mailing account number 72377,3623. As with any message to us here, please include your name, MAFC membership number, and voice phone at which we can reach you. We try to answer E-Mail at least twice a week, but expect somewhat slower responses around convention dates, when we are not near a computer.

Don't forget that there is an electronic Dimension-in-Progress for telecomputing Mythfits: **Myth-Connections BBS**, (707) 792-0806, 300/1200/2400 baud, running 24 hours for your convenience. They'd love to hear from you!

Conventions: MAFC drops ComicCon, *con*centrates on WorldCon℠

This year's World Science Fiction Convention℠, Noreascon 3℠, at the Hynes Convention Center and Sheraton-Boston Hotel in Boston, Massachusetts on August 31-September 4 of this year, will see the first appearance of MAFC east of Phoenix, Arizona, as Kevin Standlee, Rick Hallock, and Erlinda Siller will be there, and we are all looking forward to meeting as many fans from the East as possible. Thanks to Noreascon Chairman Mark Olson, MAFC has been promised a table at the convention in the Fannish Mixing Area, and a MAFC General Meeting is in the works, as well as panels and appearances with Robert

Asprin, who has also tentatively said he will be attending.. We also plan at this time to hold our traditional MAFC Room Parties at least two nights of the con. MAFC Members who are planning to attend are encouraged to let us know now, especially if any of you would be willing to help us run the MAFC table there and/or organize our party. A membership flyer for Noreascon 3 is included in most copies of this issue; if yours is missing, you can join by writing to

continued➨

Ann Arbor Notes

(from page 3)

sales on the project to date, and that before a new agreement could be reached, he would require assurances that the earnings would justify the time and energy necessary for the artists to maintain the quality of the work.

Ken Mitchroney, artist of the eight-issue adaptation of **Myth Conceptions**, tells MAFC that he is ready to do the next book, although he is currently busy as the artist on Archie Comics' **Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles** adaptation.

Donning Reorganizes; Myth Books to Continue

There are numerous rumors circulating by word of mouth and in print regarding the sale of Donning's Starblaze imprint to another publisher. Asprin has been in close contact with Donning's upper management concerning this matter, and reports: "In my conversations with Stan Hainer, Donning's President, the deal between Donning/Walsworth and Schiffer Publishing has been described as a distribution arrangement only, centered around Donning's New Age and Unilaw imprints, though some Starblaze titles will be affected. As Schiffer will be handling the inventory, orders, and billings for many of Donning's titles, there has been a reduction of the staff at Donning. Hainer has given his personal assurance, however, that the new arrangement will not affect the handling of the **Myth** novels. He also notes that while Donning still views Starblaze as an ongoing imprint, they will generally not be contracting any new properties for the next 3-4 months while the company re-organizes to accommodate the new arrangement."

Meanwhile, Asprin continues working on the ninth **Myth** novel, **M.Y.T.H. Inc. In Action**. No release date has been announced.

Conventionally Speaking

Just as we were putting this issue together, we recieved the following message from Bob:

"I am going to be Toastmaster at **Galaxy Fair/Art Con** in Dallas over the last weekend in May at the Hyatt Regency DFW (at the airport). For info call Pegasus Management (817) 572-5547. Anyhoo, there are two program items I'm particularly excited about and looking forward to: 1) a 1-2 hour solo presentation by yours truly on **The Business of Writing**, and 2) an **extremely** frank 2-3 hour session on **Authors/Editors/Publishers** which I'm doing with Brian Thompson of Warner Books... including a live 'sit in' book contract negotiation!

"It is also (in my opinion) the **premier** Art Show and auction in the SW, with Richard Pini and I splitting the duties as auctioneers! (There's also an Irish Pub night and Celtic music festival, but that wouldn't interest anyone out your way, would it?)"■

Myth-Haps
(continued)

Noreascon 3, Box 46 MIT Branch PO, Cambridge MA 02139. Memberships are $80 until July 15 and probably will be $100 at the door, so join now and save! (You might want to mention that you read about it in **MythInformation.**)

By devoting our resources to the Worldcon, we have been forced to drop our other big convention from this year's tour. At this time, we have no intention of being at the 1989 San Diego Comic Convention (San Diego Convention and Performing Arts Center/Omni Hotel, San Diego CA, August 3-6), although it is possible that one or more members of the MAFC Board of Directors may personally attend.

Our complete planned convention appearances are as follows (conventions marked with a * should be considered **tentative**, although all appearances are subject to sudden changes; call the MAFC Hotline for updated convention news):

BayCon '89 May 26-29, San Jose Red Lion Inn, San Jose CA. Membership $35 until 4/30/89, then $40. Box 70383, Sunnyvale CA 94086, (408) 272-9477.

UniCon June 24-25, Concord Sheraton Hotel, Concord CA. Membership $40 **($35 for MAFC members: use enclosed flyer and mention MAFC).** Box 6004, Concord CA 94524. Late guest added after flyer went to press: Paul Darrow.

Westercon 42 June 30-July 4, Marriott Hotel, Anaheim CA. Membership $45 until 6/15/89, then $60. PO Box 8442, Van Nuys CA 91409.

Timecon '89* July 28-30, LeBaron Hotel and Holiday Inn, San Jose CA. Further information not available at press time.

Noreascon 3/47th World Science Fiction Convention. See information above.

Free-Con 11* November 11-12, Hilton Hotel, Fresno CA. Membership **Free.** Further information not available at press time.

SiliCon '89 November 24-26, San Jose Red Lion Inn, San Jose CA. Further information not available at press time, but we expect to have more in one of the next two issues.

Looking ahead to next year, we are looking to be at Norwescon 12, BayCon '90, Westercon 43, Timecon '90, ConDiego, and SiliCon '90; write to us if you would like further details.

More Mythcellany

MAFC co-founder and Board of Directors member Edward Luena has moved to Japan with his wife Linda, and has therefore resigned his Board position. We wish Edward and Linda the best of luck in their new home. Meanwhile, Thomas Talley of Chico, California was appointed to fill Edward's position, and in a reshuffling of Board positions, Talley was appointed Treasurer and Richard Hallock was appointed Secretary. Erlinda Siller and Brin-Marie Landerman, the previous holders of those respective positions, remain members of the Board of Directors.

A big thank you to Scope Dentero, Jesse "Zaron" Cusack, and Steve Scromic of Dymenthya, MAFC's local dimension in Phoneix, Arizona, for putting on a "Perv-ect Party" while I was down there April 14-16 for **LepreCon.** The Dymenthyans have published the first issue of their local dimention-zine (dimzine?), which is available for 75¢ plus 50¢ p/h from dimension President Bill Fisher at 4615 E. Fanfol Dr., Phoenix AZ 85028. Great job, fellows!

Mailing help for this issue was provided by the members of the California State University, Chico Doctor Who Fan Club and Science Fiction Association. Thank you all.■

Robert Asprin

Illustrations by Mel. White

The three of us were busy celebrating when the Twerp walked in. Whoops—I'm getting ahead of myself already. You'll need to know the *who*, *what*, *where*, *when*, and *why* that went before to follow any of this.

The *where* of it is my place—the Yellow Crescent Inn, a fast-food franchise I run at the Bazaar of Deva. The *who* in this case is not the rock group but Tananda, a Trollop worthy of the name if ever there was one; her brother Chumley, a Troll who works under the name of Big Crunch, and me. Me? They call me Gus—convenient since it is my name. I'm a Gargoyle.

With me so far?

Okay. *What* exactly, we were celebrating was our recent victory at the Big Game on Jahk—another story entirely, you understand. That easily makes the *when* of my tale after the game, obviously. As for the *why*, well, I and my friends like to celebrate. In fact, we had already been celebrating for several days when the Twerp walked in. In terms of my story, it's fortunate we'd been celebrating that long, 'cause if any of us had been sober and thinking clearly, this story would have ended before it began.

Anyway—so much for the five W's. Confused? Good—for a minute there I was afraid you'd understand everything immediately. I've got another friend who thinks he's going to get rich writing about us—and for his sake you should read the books—but this is one story he'll never write about.

Onward.

The three of us had been partying uninterruptedly for several days. Chumley was the most uninterrupted of us; Trolls are renown for their appetites and they aren't particularly picky about what (or who) they eat. Consequently, someone would have to have been very brave, or very desperate or just plain old stupid to interrupt us.

Cue the Twerp.

Now Twerpeto is a pretty off-the-road dimension and one doesn't normally see Twerps at the Bazaar. They hang out, I'm told, in singles bars, office picnics and computer rooms. Realizing what their native habitat was like, I should have run him

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Art ©1989 Mel. White

out of my place on sight. I could've told him we didn't serve Twerps without ties—or rather we didn't serve Twerps with ties. He had a tie, a ratty little bowtie; they all do—born wearing them, I hear.

But, like I said, I'd been partying down for a couple days and I was feeling mellowed-out. I needed a little excitement: something to stir my curiosity, and he was it. I mean, he didn't look particularly desperate, or brave, but he *did* look stupid.

Picture him as he stood there before us: He was young, still green around the gills—apple-green to be specific. I've already mentioned the bowtie, but not the beanie. That's right, folks, a regulation beanie complete with a working propeller on the top. His socks didn't match—no easy trick as he was wearing hose at the time. He had a sword on his hip, slender-bladed, and as long as he was tall. And, he was being followed by a manti-kitten (that's a young manticore.) Well, actually, the manti-kitten was following the sword, batting at the tassel on the scabbard as it bounced this way and that— This guy was a *Twerp!* You could've put his picture in a guidebook to the dimensions. All he needed was the "kick me hard" sign—and then he turned around, on cue, and I realized that he had it right in the middle of his back.

Tananda and Chumley were frozen in slack-jawed astonishment. I figured that if there was going to be trouble, I'd have to start it myself.

"Looking for someone?" I asked with my nastiest smile. I always smile—it's part of being a Gargoyle—but some of my smiles are nastier than others. I meant the question rhetorically so, of course, the Twerp took it seriously.

"Yes," he said, smacking the mantikitten in the snout with his sword-scabbard as he turned. "I'm looking for Master Skeeve, the magician."

"Little person!" Chumley boomed, dropping into his Big Crunch act. "Crunch likes little persons to wash down milkshakes with."

The Twerp's sword looked too long to draw, but he had it out with a flicker of motion. The needle-point hovered inches from Chumley's eye.

"I...I wish you wouldn't," the Twerp stammered. "I'm a very nervous little person—really!"

He may have been nervous but I noticed that the sword point hadn't quivered a fraction of an inch. Chumley noticed it too. He had been half-way out of his chair, ready to pump the Big Crunch thing for all it was worth; instead he just half-stood there studying the sword-point.

"Cool it, Crunch," Tananda ordered casually, breaking the tension. "Let's hear what the Twerp has to say for himself. Eat a chair or something in the meantime."

Chumley eased back into his seat and began munching it thoughtfully. It occurred to me that Tananda had saved her brother from what he would call a "sticky wicket."

"Thank you," the Twerp smiled fleetingly as he flipped his sword into the air and caught it in the scabbard. "I really hate to use this thing."

The deftness of his moves with the long blade was not lost on Tananda. "You're pretty handy with that toad-stabber," she observed, leaning back in her chair.

"Cue the Twerp."

"Toad-stabber?" the Twerp blinked. "Oh, I wouldn't stab a Toad with it. Some of my best friends are—"

"Whatever," Tananda interrupted impatiently. "You're good with it."

"I have to be," he answered solemnly. "Twerps aren't very popular, you know."

"Is that thing housebroken?" I asked, jerking my head toward the mantikitten which, suddenly bored with the scabbard, had started stalking Chumley's foot. I'm used to my friends eating the furniture but there are limits to a host's tolerances.

"I don't know," the Twerp admitted. "He's been following me around for a couple hours now and I can't seem to get rid of him."

Without looking up from his half-eaten chair, Chumley wriggled his toes and the mantikitten swapped ends in mid-air to escape.

"You'd better hope its mamma doesn't come looking for it," I warned.

"You haven't told us why you're looking for Skeeve," Tananda asked bluntly.

"I heard through the Grapevine that I might find him here."

"Grapevines," Tananda drily observed, "are invariably more talkative than accurate. And that wasn't the question. I asked you why you were looking for him—not why were you looking for him *here*."

"Oh—sorry," the Twerp apologized. "I want to hire him. I'm new to the Bazaar and I want him to be my guide. I need a guide and a bodyguard."

"A body-guard?" Tananda blinked. "You handle a sword like a Deveel handles a cash-register and you want Skeeve for a body-guard?" friend or not, she couldn't quite keep the disbelief out of her voice.

"Oh, I'll admit I'm pretty fair with a sword but I know absolutely nothing about magic and I hear that there are beings at the Bazaar who, frankly, *dabble*."

"Here and there," I agreed with equal solemnity.

The Twerp had a positive talent for understatement. He was standing in the middle of the biggest magick exchange in all the known and unknown dimensions and he was worried about beings who merely *dabbled*.

"Just one more question," Tananda asked, staring thoughtfully at the ceiling. "Do you, perchance, collect obscure quotes?"

"Quotes? Quotes? I like quotes but I have trouble remembering them. Whenever I try to use one someone always tells me I've got it wrong, or I've credited it wrong. What's that got to do with Skeeve?"

Instead of answering, Tananda lunged forward in her chair, snapping her fingernails with an incongruously loud sound. The Twerp froze statue-still. She got Chumley's and my attention too.

"New spell, little sister?" Chumley asked, cocking an eyebrow at her.

"I've had it for a while," she admitted, "but I can only do it a few times so I save it for emergencies."

"And this is an emergency?" I interjected, trying to focus my eyes and my mind at the same time. Like I said: it had been a very long party.

Tananda just rolled her eyes heavenward. "Get it together, guys," she urged. "Who do we know who's young, gullible, has a half-grown familiar that'll be dangerous if it ever grows up, is better at what he does than he knows—and can't get a quote right to save his life?"

"Skeeve," Chumley and I answered without hesitation. After all, certain things are obvious even when you've drunk yourself into next week.

"Right. *That's* why this is an emergency." She hefted her mug as if she'd reached her conclusions with crystal clarity.

"I don't get it," Chumley admitted before I did.

"Weren't you listening?" She was starting to get a bit shrill around the edges. "This Twerp's looking for Skeeve. He wants to hire Skeeve for a bodyguard here on Deva."

I was studying the ceiling and eavesdropping with intense interest. "Tananda—dear," I interrupted, "if you've got a point to make, could you please make it in a hurry. I think I'm going to throw up in a few minutes."

"Spot too much of the old bubbly, eh, old boy?" Chumley inquired, winking his larger eye at me.

"Not too much," I insisted proudly. "Just drinking the wrong stuff again. I warned you that strawberry milkshakes are not a good mixer."

"Strange—it never bothers me," Chumley countered, taking another huge slug and letting the pink ooze down his misshapen chins.

"If you two are though congratulating yourselves," Tananda interrupted. "I will try to explain things to you—again. Skeeve is pretty good in the sorcery department but he can't fight his way out of a wet paper bag, right? Still, I think we'll all agree he ends up in a disproportionate amount of trouble, also right?"

"It's to be expected if he hangs around with that blackguard, Aahz," Chumley commented, blotting up the remains of the milkshake.

"But still he, and not Aahz, winds up in the pot," I reminded my friend. "Keep going, Tananda."

"Now, all of us plus several of our friends spend large hunks of our time bailing Skeeve out of his various mis-adventures. Imagine what happens if he teams up with someone else of a similar woebegone nature—say someone who's good with his sword but rather weak in the sorcery department? Hmm?"

A sobering thought. Well, a half-sobering thought. Not that I minded, really. I was sober now in the half that had wanted to toss its cookies mere moments before. We all sat staring at the paralyzed Twerp. The possibilities were horrifying: If this kid teamed up with Skeeve—a Twerp and a Klahd...

"It'd never happen," Chumley reassured himself. "Aahz is a bit of a bounder but he watches out for his apprentices like a swamp-cat with one kitten. He'd never let Skeeve get involved with riff-raff like this."

"Sure—the same way he kept Skeeve out of the Big Game?" I couldn't resist needling him.

Tananda said nothing but reached out to heft the Twerp's money-pouch. She thumped it lightly with a fingernail. "Unless I'm losing my touch this riff-raff Twerp's got over a hundred in gold here." She shrugged apologetically. "I spotted it when he walked in, but it's always worth double-checking."

"So much for Aahz' protective instincts," I said with a snort. "For a hundred in gold he'd lower the kid into a live volcano."

"Only if he'd dropped one of us in first," Chumley corrected, "but I'll concede the point anyway. My only question worth asking, little sister, is what, exactly, are we supposed to do about it.?"

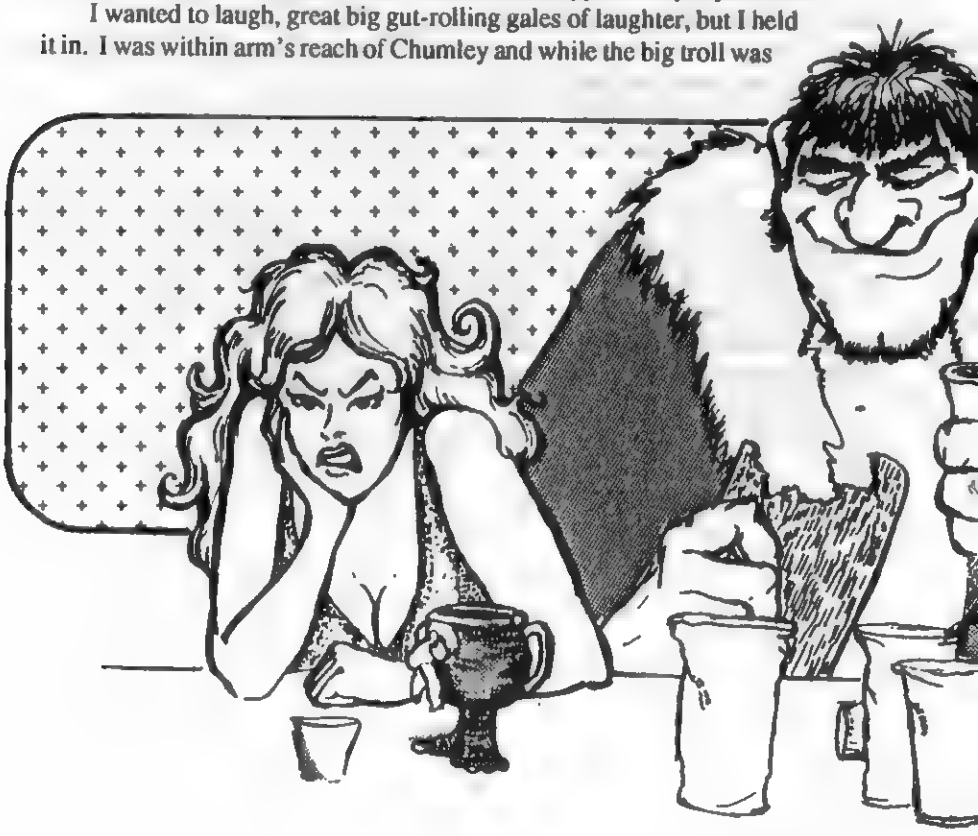
"There's only one thing we *can* do," Tananda shrugged. "We've got to keep them from joining forces. One of us will have to take the bodyguard job."

"I've got to clean the grill," I remembered with unseemly haste.

"And I couldn't appear in public with a Twerp," Chumley reminded her. "It would ruin me professionally. Besides, the lad's afraid of me."

"Wait a minute, guys," Tananda said desperately. Half-sloshed or not, she could count down from three pretty well. "It might be *my* idea—but you don't expect *me* to do it with him. Think what would happen to my reputation!"

I wanted to laugh, great big gut-rolling gales of laughter, but I held it in. I was within arm's reach of Chumley and while the big troll was



quick to put his little sister down, he's rather thin-skinned with the rest of us taking similar liberties. In the interest of my continued overall good health I contained my laughter in my stomach and let him do the talking.

"Come, come, little sister," he chided. "You are the logical choice. As you said: it was your idea, after all. Eh, what?"

"If the two of you weren't so far in the bag you would have thought of it long before I did," she defended herself.

"Don't know about that," I smiled—another of my smiles. "This isn't the first time you've pointed out how dumb we were. No—I figure it will take someone of your lightning wit to escort a Twerp around the Bazaar."

"Gus," she growled at me, "you can take your less-than-lightening wit and–"

"Then it's settled," Chumley interrupted, preparing to resume his chair-munching. "You may as well snap him out of it, little sister. The only thing that might be worse than spending time with Twerp is spending a lot of time with a Twerp. Don't you agree?"

"But—Oh, pook!" With an obscene wave of her hand, Tananda surrendered to her fate and removed the spell in the same gesture. "I have a proposition for you, Twerp," she announced as the bewildered fellow yawned back into reality.

"Because I can't remember quotes?" he mumbled.

"Look," Tanda sighed, "if you keep interrupting me whin I'm talking to you, we'll never get anywhere. Mister—say, what is your name anyway?"

"Monty," the Twerp replied with a modest bow.

"Figures," our Tanda winced.

"No, not Figures—just Monty."

Chumley choked silently on a piece of the chair.

"You're interrupting again," Tananda scowled and pointed a warning finger at him. "Now listen up. The kid—I mean Master Skeeve is a pretty hot item right now. As a personal friend of his I happen to know he's booked solid for the next several weeks—at least. I, myself, on the other hand, am between engagements at the moment. Rather than have you delay your trip through the Bazaar—which you would have to do if you waited for Master Skeeve—I figure I'll do both of you a favor by escorting you myself."

"Are you sure you're up to it?" Monty said with a frown.

Tananda's completion took a dangerous hue.

"Knowing them both, as I do," I intervened quickly, "I can vouch for Tananda's ability to stand-in for Skeeve. Not only that—but she'll provide her services for a fraction of what Master Skeeve would have charged." I smiled again—although I should consider what it costs in maintenance for me to entertain my friends. Chumley had started on another chair. Tanda gave me a black look—totally ignoring how helpful I was trying to be. Wasn't I wrapping up the job for her? The fact that I was honking her out of a fat fee had nothing to do with it—she'd do the same for me, I was sure.

"No," the Twerp retorted firmly. "If I accept her service—and I do—I insist on paying her the same amount I was going to offer Master Skeeve: one gold piece."

Chumley flinched so hard he spilled his drink and I was in pain from the effort of suppressing my laughter. One gold piece! We had all assumed the Twerp was ready to drop his whole bankroll on Skeeve. If dear, old Monty had tried to hire Skeeve for one gold piece Aahz would have thrown the Twerp right out the door—and not bothered opening it first.

Now Tananda was stuck. She had offered her services—and they had definitely been accepted—and the Bazaar is no place to renege on a deal.

"I feel much better now that that's settled," the Twerp announced grandly. "Shall we go, my lady?"

"Hmm? Oh—yeah, sure," Tananda mumbled as she emerged from shock. "Just where was it that you wanted to go?"

"I have to find a Deveel named the Geek," Monty explained. "I owe him money from a bet."

Tananda opened her mouth and shut it again without saying a word. She led the way to the door and held it as Monty strode proudly out into the Bazaar. The mantikitten wanted to follow, but Tanda managed to slip through first and slam the door in its face. With speed that denied his size, Chumley was out of his chair and at the door. He held it open just far enough to let the mantikitten escape—which it

did after favoring him with a bristle-haired hiss.

"She'll love you for that—adding insult to injury," I snickered.

"Little sister is always at her best in the face of adversity," the troll retorted. "I only wish we could tag along to watch the fun. Tananda's going to take Monty to the Geek's to pay off a bet. A Trollop, a Twerp and a Deveel bookie—I'd give a weekend's bar-bill to see that."

"Done," I exclaimed, slapping my palm on the counter.

"I beg your pardon?"

"Done," I repeated. "You pay our bar bill for a full weekend and I'll fix it so you can watch your little sister—so we both can see, actually."

"And how do you propose to do that?"

"Invisible cloaks," I beamed—have you ever seen a gargoyle beam? "I keep some in the back for my special customers—folks who don't want to be seen eating the food here."

"And for *that* you expect me to fork over a weekend's drinks?" the troll snarled.

"It was *your* offer," I reminded him. "Of course, I could follow them alone while you run around the Bazaar trying to rent another cloak."

That brought the argument to a halt though it took us longer to get outfitted than I'd anticipated. Due to Chumley's size we couldn't get a single cloak to conceal all of him. We solved that problem by wrapping one around his waist kilt-wise and draping another over his head. He would have looked quite silly—if anyone could have seen him that is.

Once we got underway our progress through the Bazaar was slow. I guess I'd never stopped to think how people just naturally get out of the way of gargoyles and trolls until we were invisible and nobody budged. Fortunately Tananda's trail wasn't hard to follow. Aside from the fact that we knew where she was headed, the way was littered with collapsed stalls and bodies sprawled hither and yon in various states of disrepair. Some of the unfortunates had simply had their gyros scrambled while others bore the unmistakable trademarks of Tananda when she's in a bad mood.

As it was we failed to overtake our errant duo until we reached the Even Odds, the cocktail lounge which was the Geek's favorite hangout. The mantikitten was curled up asleep on the door—the door that was lying some ten feet from the doorway. Chumley and I assumed, therefore, that whatever action was going to take place was going to take place inside. We stepped carefully over the kitten and eased on into the dark interior.

There were relatively few conscious beings in the lounge—three to be exact. As one might expect: Tananda, Monty, and the Geek. The rest were artfully arranged against the chairs, each other and the floor. Except the bartender—he was having an argument with his reflection in the mirror, and losing.

"Ninety-eight...ninety-nine...one-hundred!" Monty was saying as he completed arranging his coins on the table in front of the Geek.

"Thank you very much," the Geek grinned. Deveels don't have half the range

"Tananda's trail wasn't hard to follow."

of smiles we do—but he positively consumed that gold with his eyes. "I appreciate a bettor who pays his debts on time."

"...Much more than you admire people who come to collect their bets on time," Tananda put in.

"Are you still mad?" The Deveel asked gently. "Nothing personal. I can't help if the boys got a little frisky."

"No trouble," Tananda shrugged. "Good help is hard to find."

"I still think the whole fight was unnecessary," Monty complained. "I wasn't threatened at all. All they said was: 'Look who's dating Twerps.'"

"A bodyguard can't be too careful," Tanda smiled. Ah, yes—a Trollop's smile.

"That job I offered you is still open, Tanda," the Geek said urgently. "It's *got* to pay better than what you're doing now, and it's less work."

"Thanks but no thanks. I'll stick with free-lancing. Steady pay makes me nervous."

"Okay," the Geek shrugged. "I was afraid you might be getting a little desperate, that's all—"

"Geek, old friend," Tananda said lightly. "Are you going to wipe that grin off your face—or should I do it for you?"

Needless to say, the Geek's smile vanished in a heartbeat. I heard a stifled chuckle from the vicinity where I last felt Chumley.

"Incidentally—I've been meaning to ask, just what was your bet about?"

"Oh, he bet me that he could jump higher that the building," Monty admitted glumly. "And I lost because—"

"—Because the building can't jump at all." Tananda groaned. "C'mon Geek—I thought you were above such things!"

"Not so long as there're Twerps with a hundred in gold to spare," the Deveel retorted, fingering the coins meaningfully.

"I don't actually have that kind of money to spare," Monty confided. "In fact, I had to borrow heavily to pay off the debt."

"How heavily?" Tananda asked cautiously.

"Five-year's-work-without-pay heavily," he grimaced. "As you probably know, Twerps aren't in high demand in the current market. When we can find work, the pay is peanuts."

"I thought it was jelly-beans these days," Tananda corrected him. "Well—Geek?"

"'Well—Geek' what?" the Deveel glared back at her. "Is it my fault the Twerp here bets money he can't afford to lose? Is this not the Bazaar of Deva? A bet's a bet!"

"But it seemed like such a sure thing—"

"Can it, Monty," Tananda hissed at her erstwhile employer. "I'm trying to make a deal here."

I groaned inwardly, but kept my silence, which was more than could be said for Chumley. Judging by the sounds emanating from his direction I'd guess the troll

was in serious danger of death-by-hemorrhage. We've all been hanging around Aahz too long.

"All right, Geek," Tananda smiled, displaying a dangerous number of teeth. "how'd you like to make a little bet with me?"

"Anytime," the Geek fawned. "This is how I keep from working for a living."

"How about—" Tanda began.

"No! Not a bet that you set up! I've been burned once too often by your tricky little phrases. I'm no Twerp."

"Okay," Tananda conceded. "What do you feel like betting on today?"

"Let me see..." The Deveel pondered ostentatiously. "It should be something suitable for a Trollop travelling with a Twerp. Really, Tanda—I can hardly believe I'm seeing this. I'll bet your brother would tan your precious hide if he knew the company you're keeping."

"Is it my fault the Twerp here bets money he can't afford to lose?"

"Done!" Tanda exalted. "Name your odds."

"What?" the Geek babbled. "Odds? Who said it was a bet? Wait a minute–"

"What say that sack of gold in front of you against my working for *you* for the next year."

The Deveel paused, considered then smiled. "Done. I do think you've outfoxed yourself this time, Tananda. I happen to know that after your last little caper in the Big Game on Jahk, Chumley's planning to prune back the riff-raff around you. Unless *his* taste has deteriorated as badly as yours has I doubt he'd find Twerps acceptable."

"Oh, really?" Monty asked, hand already on his sword.

"Relax!" Tanda ordered. "Actually, Geek, Chumley not only knows who I'm with right now—but it was his idea that I take this assignment. Now pay up."

"Dear Tananda—you don't expect me to take your word for it—do you?" the Geek sneered.

"Yes, I expect you to," Tananda admitted, "but I'm not surprised that you don't. So, why don't you ask him yourself. C'mon out, big brother."

"What?" the Deveel said as he blanched. It's an interesting phenomena; they become the color of fresh cooked shrimp.

Tananda ignored him, staring instead into the corner where Chumley and I were supposed to be hiding. "I know you're there," she insisted. "I'd recognize that snigger anywhere."

Chumley emerged—the top half of him anyway. "She's got us, Gus."

"Thanks, old buddy," I snarled, doffing my own cloak. "Until you opened your mouth she didn't know *I* was here."

Tananda's eyes narrowed dangerously when they met mine—but her reaction was nothing compared to the Geek's.

"What's this? A set up!" he roared with injured dignity.

"It was your bet—remember?" Tananda purred.

"Is Skeeve here too?" the Geek demanded, peering into the corners and waving his arms frantically. "I smell that Klahd's hand in this."

"Do you know Skeeve the magician?" Monty asked, awestruck.

"I'll say I do," the Geek growled. "He cost me a bundle the last time our paths crossed."

"Well, he's jolly well not here now," Chumley said. "My little sister put it to you all by herself—and right well, if I do say so myself. Pay up."

"Sure, sure," the Deveel said, waving the troll to silence. "Now where is *he*?"

"Geek—I say, old man," Chumley whispered softly. "I said Skeeve isn't here. Are you calling me a liar?"

Even the Geek knows better than to anger a troll. "No. No! It's just...No!" he stuttered. "If you say he's not here, that's good enough for me."

"Is he really your brother?" Monty asked Tananda in a moment of quiet.

"Forget it," she ordered. "In fact—if you value your life, Twerp, forget everything and everyone associated with this whole fiasco."

"That's right, old boy," Chumley added. "I'm sure I speak for all of us in seconding little sister's suggestion."

Confronted by our unanimous urgings, the Twerp swallowed hard and nodded.

"Now, as to this pile of gold here," Tananda continued. "How'd you like to make a little bet with me?"

"Sorry," Monty said, drawing himself up to his full insignificant height. "I've decided to give up gambling."

"But you're going to win this one!" Tanda pleaded.

"That's what I thought when I lost it to him in the first place. I only need to make a mistake once. I might be a Twerp but I'm not dumb."

"You could mug him in reverse," the Geek suggested helpfully. "You know—knock him out and put the money back in his pouch."

"Stay out of this, Geek," the Trollop snapped, fairly beside herself with frustration.

"I've got a better idea," I volunteered. "Isn't there something that you want, Tanda? Or more specifically, something you'd pay him a hundred in gold for him *not* to do?"

"Gus! You're a genius," she exclaimed. I knew my recent offenses were forgiven and that she once again appreciated me for my true self.

Scooping up the gold she thrust it into the Twerp's unwilling arms. "Here!" she proclaimed. "in exchange for this I want your solemn promise that you will never, ever go anywhere near the dimension Klah or Skeeve the Magician. Agreed?"

"But—"

"Agreed?"

"Okay," he shrugged. "Well I...I'd really like to buy you all a drink, but I must be going."

"That's all right," I assured him.

"Don't forget your little mantikitten," Chumley added.

There was an overall feeling of relief once the Twerp had gone. It was as if a great weight had been lifted from our shoulders.

"Speaking of drinks," I declared, "that strikes me as an excellent idea."

"I'll pour," Chumley agreed, snatching up a bottle, biting through its neck and swallowing the contents in one gulp.

"Say—If you don't mind—just what was all that about Skeeve?" the Geek asked.

"I think I've guaranteed that Skeeve and that Twerp will never meet," Tananda explained. "Could you imagine what would happen if those two joined forces—here, at the Bazaar?"

"With Aahz coaching them," the Deveel murmured softly. "Indeed—the possibilities are endless..."

"Wait a minute, Geek," I warned, taking a step toward him. "Before you get any ideas in that perverted mind of yours—"

"That's Per-vect!"

"Agreed?"

We all jumped guiltily and turned to find Aahz striding through the door.

"Hi, Aahz!"

"Have a drink, Aahz."

"We were just talking about you, old boy—"

"No we weren't. Here—have a drink, Aahz."

"Just a minute," Aahz bellowed. "Anytime you pack of chiselers offer to buy me a drink I know there's something strange going on. 'Fess up."

"Is Skeeve with you?" the Geek asked with too much eagerness.

"No he isn't. I'm just here to pick up my winnings from the Big Game—and don't go changing the subject. What's going on here?"

"You wouldn't believe what just happened here," the Deveel began.

"That's right, Geek," Chumley interrupted. "Let's tell him *all* about it; *all* about it—including the bet you just lost. There're lots of people here at the Bazaar who'd just *love* to hear about the bet the Geek lost."

The Geek swallowed hard and looked away.

"Will *somebody* tell me what's going on here!" Aahz pleaded.

"Actually," I began to explain, "Chumley here just lost a bet to me—a bet which covers drinks for the entire weekend. Now—do you want in or not?"

"Are Twerps gullible?" Aahz grinned. Aahz' grins are second only to my own in subtlety and he didn't seem to notice that we gagged in unison. "Pour one for me, Chumley. I haven't had a drink since I got here and that's too long to go dry!"

Chumley's knuckles whitened slightly as he poured the first of what would surely be many rounds—but pour he did and I knew, for the moment at least, that peace had returned to my life. ■

The Bazaar

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